

From "The Times", Tuesday, 19th January, 2010.

French Nuclear Fallout

The French nuclear industry was in turmoil as uranium supplies dried up and treatment of spent fuel was blocked amid an increasingly bitter row between Henri Proglio, the chairman of EDF, and Anne Lauvergeon, his counterpart at Areva, the nuclear energy group.

EDF said that Areva had stopped uranium deliveries on January, 4th, and was refusing to remove spent fuel. Areva denied that it had stopped uranium supplies but confirmed EDF's claims about the block on treating spent fuel.

From The Times, Wednesday, 20th January, 2010.

International Power Comes Under Fire

International Power was at the centre of a deepening row over its handling of an aborted tie-up with GDF Suez after it emerged that a statement published on Monday, which wiped £500 million from its market value, had come after two months of pressure from City regulators. The announcement that the two companies had abandoned talks about a possible partnership was issued after discussions with the Financial Services Authority (FSA) after weekend speculation of an imminent take-over bid from GDF. The Times has learned that this was the second time that International Power had been contacted by the FSA in less than two months. A clarification was also discussed in November, after earlier speculation about a bid, but the company declined to issue one. Investors and brokers said that the company should not have waited until 3 p.m. on Monday to publish the statement and said the incident raised questions about the creation of a false market. International Power rejected the allegations.

Dr. I. Fairlie in the Guardian, Letters and e-mails, on Wednesday, 20th January, 2010:

You reported the view that radiation risks are exaggerated, but left out vital information on radiation protection (Radiation health threat overstated – Oxford professor, 11 January). The article relied upon and extensively cited a retired -professor of particle physics, Wade -Allison, who is neither a radiation -biologist nor an epidemiologist, and is not in my view an expert in radiation risks. Indeed, the other three scientists quoted in the article pointedly refrained from supporting Allison. His sole contribution to the literature is a self-published book.

An article alongside (Nuclear theory: the current consensus) states that "a single dose below 100 millisieverts (mSv) is usually considered safe", and later gives Allison's claim that "there is a threshold of about 200 mSv, below which the body can repair all DNA -damage caused and, therefore, which is safe". But there is no safe dose of -radiation: no matter how low it is, a small risk remains.

The linear no-threshold (LNT) theory is used by all the world's radiation authorities – the UN Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation, the International Commission on Radiological Protection, the Health Protection Agency, etc – to estimate risks at low doses. It presumes that risks decline proportionately as you lower the dose all the way down to zero, and that the only dose with no effect is zero mSv.

And, yes, there is evidence that exposures to residents near nuclear facilities cause them harm. For example, a recent German government study found large increases in leukaemia (220%) and embryonal cancer (160%) among children living near all German nuclear -reactors. Its results are supported by many other worldwide studies into child leukaemias near nuclear reactors.

Current radiation risks are based on an unsatisfactory dataset – the Japanese survivors of the US atomic bombs in 1945. Though relevant for estimating the risks of sudden blasts of powerful types of radiation, this data is irrelevant for slow, long-term exposures or for weaker types of radiation which are more common. And many studies point to the risks being higher than this data suggests.

Then there are the unusual non--targeted effects of radiation. These cause changes in cells temporally and spatially distant from the cells hit by radiation. These effects challenge the present explanation of radiation's effects but are unknown by the public. They are hotly discussed by radiation biologists throughout the world, and are the -subject of thousands of -scientific articles. The older explanation had given considerable support to current estimates of radiation risks. The new effects strikingly do not do this, as they occur after very low doses of -radiation. In other words, these new effects raise -serious questions about whether -existing dose limits should be tightened.

I do not think current radiation risks are overrated, and neither do most -scientists in this field.

In best sycophantic mood, the Copeland MP appeared in Hansard:

The Prime Minister was asked—

Mr. Speaker: I call Jamie Reed. [Interruption.] Order. I am sure Government Back Benchers want to hear Mr. Reed. Q14. [314810]

Mr. Jamie Reed (Copeland) (Lab): It is true. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister will be aware that he is the only leader of any political party to support nuclear new build in this country. What certainty can he give my constituents, businesses and the supply chain in my constituency that we will make the necessary changes to the planning system to enable them to invest with confidence and certainty?

The Prime Minister: I hope that there is all-party support for the nuclear expenditure that is necessary to give us security in our power. It is 8 minutes past 12 and I understand that the current Conservative party policy is that nuclear power is a last resort. That is not the basis on which one can plan for the future. The Conservatives can change their policies every day. We will remain consistent in support for the energy needs of our country.

Sadly, this is what passes for political debate and gravity these days.

